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Traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming General Assembly resolution 52/99 of 12 December 1997 and other relevant resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights and the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities,

Recalling the reports of the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on traditional practices affecting the health of women and children and of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women, its causes and consequences,

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Reaffirming the obligation of all States to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms as stated in the Charter of the United Nations, reaffirming also the obligations contained in later human rights instruments, in particular article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,[1] article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[2] and mindful of article 2, subparagraph (a) of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women,[3]

Recalling the provisions of the outcome of the World Conference on Human Rights,[4] the International Conference on Population and Development,[5] the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders[6] and the Fourth World Conference on Women[7] pertaining to traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls,

Reaffirming that such practices constitute a definite form of violence against women and girls and a serious form of violation of their human rights,

Expressing concern at the continuing large-scale existence of such practices,

Stressing that the elimination of such practices requires greater efforts and commitment from Governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental and community organizations, and that fundamental changes in societal attitudes are required,

1. *Welcomes*:

(a) The report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and children,[8] which provides encouraging examples of national best practices and international cooperation;

(b) The efforts undertaken by United Nations bodies, programmes and organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Fund for Women to address the issue of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, and encourages them to continue to coordinate their efforts;

(c) The work carried out by the Special Ambassador of the United Nations Population Fund for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and the fact that she has been invited to various countries, as well as the establishment, by the Population Fund, of a trust fund to support her work;

(d) The work carried out by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children and other non-governmental and community organizations, including women's organizations, in raising awareness of the harmful effects of such practices, in particular of female genital mutilation;

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[1] Resolution 34/180, annex.

[2] Resolution 44/25, annex.

[3] Resolution 48/104.

[4] A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

[5] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[6] See A/CONF.169/16, chap. I.

[7] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[8] A/53/354.

(e) The fact that the Commission on the Status of Women addressed the issue of harmful traditional or customary practices at its session in 1998;

2. *Emphasizes* the need for technical and financial assistance to developing countries working to achieve elimination of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls from United Nations funds and programmes, international and regional financial institutions and bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as the need for assistance to non-governmental organizations and community-based groups active in this field from the international community;

3. *Calls upon* all States:

(a) To ratify, if they have not yet done so, the relevant human rights treaties, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[1] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[2] and to respect and fully implement their obligations under such treaties to which they are parties;

(b) To implement their international commitments in this field, *inter alia*, under the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action,[3] the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,[5] and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights;[4]

(c) To develop and implement national legislation and policies prohibiting traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, through appropriate measures against those responsible and to establish, if they have not done so, a concrete national mechanism for implementation and monitoring of legislation, law enforcement and national policies;

(d) To intensify efforts to raise awareness of and to mobilize international and national public opinion concerning the harmful effects of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, in particular through education, information dissemination, training, the media and local community meetings, in order to achieve the total elimination of these practices;

(e) To promote the inclusion of discussion of the empowerment of women and their human rights in primary and secondary education curricula and to specifically address traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls in such curricula as well as in the training of health personnel;

(f) To involve, among others, public opinion leaders, educators, religious leaders, chiefs, traditional leaders, medical practitioners, women's health and family planning organizations and the media in publicity campaigns, with a view to promoting a collective and individual awareness of the human rights of women and girls and of how harmful traditional or customary practices violate those rights;

(g) To explore, through consultations with communities and religious and cultural groups and their leaders, alternatives to harmful traditional or customary practices, in particular where those practices form part of a ritual ceremony or rite of passage;

(h) To cooperate closely with the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on traditional practices affecting the health of women and children and to respond to her inquiries;

(i) To cooperate closely with relevant United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies as well as with relevant non-governmental and community organizations, in a joint effort to eradicate traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls;

(j) To include in their reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other relevant treaty bodies specific information on measures taken to eliminate traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation;

(k) To address the issue of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls in their national evaluations of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(l) To include specific information on measures taken to eliminate traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, in the reports they submit on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action to the Secretariat in preparation of the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 aimed at an appraisal and assessment of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action;

4. *Invites*:

(a) Relevant specialized agencies, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations to exchange information on the subject of the present resolution, and encourages the exchange of information on the subject of the present resolution between non-governmental organizations active in this field and the bodies monitoring the implementation of relevant human rights treaties;

(b) The Commission on the Status of Women to address, at its next session, the subject of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, during its review of the critical area of concern, "Women and health";

(c) The Commission on Human Rights to address this subject at its next session, thus enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of these practices on women's human rights;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General:

(a) To make his report[8] available to relevant meetings within the United Nations system;

(b) To include information on the subject of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls in the compilation of updated statistics and indicators on the situation of women and girls around the world, which he is requested to provide by the end of 1999, by issuing, for example, a volume of *The World's Women*;

(c) To make available to the Commission on Human Rights, at its fifty-fifth session, the outcome of the discussions in the Commission on the Status of Women on this issue, if necessary in the form of an oral report;

(d) To report to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the present resolution with a special focus on recent national and international developments.